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Lucia A Keegan 09/20/2006 10:01:31 AM From DB/Inbox: Lucia A Keegan

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INFO RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0554
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SIPDIS

FROM USMISSION UNESCO PARIS

STATE PASS TO NPS - STEPHEN MORRIS AND PAUL HOFFMAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [UNESCO](#) [SCUL](#) [LE](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: MINOR DAMAGE TO LEBANESE WORLD HERITAGE SITES

1. Summary: UNESCO officials reported that damage to key Lebanese World Heritage sites was much less than expected, based on an initial report by UNESCO experts. End summary.

2. A press conference was held this morning, September 18, at UNESCO headquarters to present the findings of a special mission of cultural preservation experts sent to Lebanon September 10-15 to examine damage at Lebanese World Heritage sites that had been damaged in the recent conflict.

3. The team, led by former UNESCO Cultural Assistant Director General, Mounir Bouchenaki, was invited by the Lebanese Ministry of Culture, to visit Lebanon's listed World Heritage sites: Baalbek, Tyre, Anjar, and Byblos.

4. According to Bouchenaki, the Baalbek site did not suffer any major visible damage. One stone block of the Jupiter Temple complex fell as a result of nearby bombing, and certain cracks had apparently widened. Outside of the World Heritage site, some traditional homes and parts of the old souk were, however, damaged.

5. In Tyre, The seaside site did not suffer any visible damage. There was, however, some damage to the Roman era frescos in the site's caves, where some of the frescos were detached from the walls due to vibrations from the bombings.

6. At Anjar, the ramparts, palace and mosque had no visible damage.

7. The most immediate concern was for the problems the team found at Byblos, where the port had suffered from an important oil spill. While most of the oil has been removed, the UNESCO team fears that the oil residue on the stone foundations of the harbor must be removed quickly and by hand to avoid any lasting damage. The team

estimates that a team of 20-25 young Lebanese, trained on stone conservation could clean the stone in 8-10 weeks maximum, before winter.

¶18. ADG Francoise Riviere told the press conference that USD 75,000 has been set aside for initial funding of the World Heritage emergency work. She said that she is also in discussions with the Italian government and with the European Union regarding additional funding for the repairs. Riviere mentioned a possible donation of up to USD 1 million from the European Union. She estimated that USD 100,000 should be sufficient to repair the damage surveyed at this point. A second mission will be sent in the future to develop more complete studies on damage to the Lebanese World Heritage sites, as well as to create a "risk map".

¶19. Photos and a video report on the sites that were visited are currently on the UNESCO website, www.unesco.org.

¶10. Comment: The tone of the press conference was in keeping with UNESCO's recent efforts to treat Lebanon as a technical problem that can be solved without resort to politics. Both Riviere and Bouchenaki batted away questions from Middle Eastern journalists that attempted to pin blame on Israel and in one case asked why UNESCO is not asking Israel to pay for the cleanup of Byblos. A member of the Israeli UNESCO delegation told Charge after the meeting that he, too, was satisfied with the even-handedness of the meeting. KOSS